

Interview with Denise Abbey

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project
Information Series

DENISE ABBEY

Interviewed by: G. Lewis Schmidt

Initial interview date: May 16, 1988

Copyright 1998 ADST

Q: This is Lew Schmidt interviewing Denise Abbey. This is May 16, 1988. And Denise started her career with the War Information Program in 1944. I'm going to ask her to give a brief synopsis with her early start with the Office of War Information. Then when we get to the overseas part of her program we'll go into more detail. Denise.

Getting Into Wartime Information Work—OWI

ABBEY: I was employed in New York City as an Executive Secretary and was notified that the Office of War Information was seeking college graduates with secretarial experience. I applied, was accepted and was expected to go to work immediately but I insisted on two weeks notice to my employer. They said it was war time. I said, yes, but if I don't give them notice how do you know I'll give you notice? So they gave me my two weeks. I went to work on the first Monday in January 1944 in the Office of West 57th Street under the aegis of Walter Anderson in the reception and assignment section for new employees. All who came to us had already been accepted. They were in every division, from every corner of the earth. My job was to assign them to the Marshall Field Estate for a period of training,

Library of Congress

also employ them locally in some part of the vast offices and then see that they got AGO cards before they put their uniforms on.

One of the most interesting things that happened during that period was a lecture by Colonel Henderson who had been assigned by General Eisenhower to set up the Information Program for the liberated people. I left Washington on the 19th of April for assignment overseas and went to Camp Patrick Henry in Virginia expecting to leave in a few days but actually remained two weeks until enough women were collected for the transport.

European Arrival

I went over on the transport, the General Mann, which was a ship that had been built for the Grace line. We took nine days to arrive. In Oran we were received by the local information group and after a couple of days were put on a train to Algiers where we arrived and were assigned to offices. I was placed in the office of John Albert who was stockpiling for the invasion of France that summer. I admit that I did not understand exactly what was going on, but I worked with him satisfactorily. In fact, he wanted to keep me. But at the end of two weeks I was sent on to my assigned post in Naples, going over on the Winchester Castle, a British transport.

We arrived in Naples for one of the most extraordinary events I have ever experienced. The Harbor of Naples had been rendered impossible by German bombing and was absolutely a nest of nothing but wrecks. It took us five hours from the entrance of the harbor to wind our way through the wrecks and come to the “docking area.” I phrase it that way because the Maritima at that time was a wreck. And beside it there was an overturned Italian cruiser. The Americans had built a catwalk on her and we landed and came ashore on the catwalk on the overturned Italian cruiser! And I set foot in Europe below the castle.

Intelligence and Psyops in Italy—Internal Reports

Library of Congress

We were taken up to the headquarters, which was in the Singer Building. There is something attractive about the Singer Building because again and again that was our headquarters in different cities of Europe. At the Singer Building I was taken to the office of George Edmund with two other women. He said, I have three jobs. One calls for a knowledge of Italian. One of the girls, Mary Burke, said, I've had a year of Italian. He said, good. You go work for Albert Spaulding in Italia Combata. Spaulding, of course the famous violinist, had been with Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, and they both had been in Italy in the first World War. And he was in charge of Italia Combata, which was the recipient of information from people behind the line, the partisans and others.

Mr. Edmund then said, I have a job that calls for somebody who, if you can't speak Italian, should know French. I said, well, I have French. He said, "all right. You're assigned to D Section. You will go across the street and report to Captain Manley." Did you ever try to cross the main street in Naples without traffic lights and with war traffic? I made it feeling simply harried.

I went into a tall apartment building and was looking for a staircase, since obviously there was no elevator, when a man came up behind me. He said, is this Ms. Abbey? And I said, yes. He said, well, I am Captain Greenlees, Ian Greenlees. Captain Manley has gone up to Rome, but he asked me to take care of you.

And so I was taken up to the top floor, which was held by D Section. The "D," I thought at first, meant Diplomatic. It turned out it was simply A, B, C, D, and meant the general intelligence. That particular section had two assignments. One, it handled information that came in from behind the lines and prepared a secret report of over 300 copies which was distributed all over the world to different military and diplomatic sources.

The second section, of which I became a member, was that which recorded the reactions of the Italian people to the armies of occupation. We also prepared a 300 copy secret report which went out to the same divisions all over the world.

Library of Congress

Rome Falls OWI/Psyops Moves to Rome

I was in Naples only a couple of weeks when Rome fell. I had a rather strange experience then. Two men and I were waiting for transport to get to the Circulo Vesuviana Railroad to go out to Pompeii on a Sunday morning, when a helmeted and leather-clad messenger dropped his motorcycle and rushed through the entrance. As he went through, he threw over his shoulder, "Rome fell," and went upstairs. We found out later in the day that it was true—that Rome was now liberated. And I was immediately assigned forward, though not given any departure date.

I came to the office one morning at eleven o'clock after some outside duties. The phone rang, I lifted it and they said "your office is moving at one o'clock." So I hollered until one of the officers came, Captain John Vernon, a British officer. It was a mixed English and American unit. And it was called then, PWB, Psychological Warfare Branch. It was, of course, OWI on the American side. And the British contributed information people from their side.

The Captain took the message. He said "We have two hours to get the office packed and ourselves packed from our billet and are going up to Rome today." We shoved together everything that we could find to get the truck that would enable us, once in Rome, to put out the report. One other woman, a British girl, Rowena Vining, who was the one who usually edited the report, and I then were raced back to our billet to collect our belongings. By 1:30 we were in an open truck on our way to Rome.

It was the 14th of June. It was one of the more extraordinary adventures I think I ever had,. because we followed the armies and we went through the armies, armies of every country on earth. The roads were marked "do not go more than three feet beyond the borders" — bombs. It said, "shoulders cleared only three feet." We should have taken the hill road and we didn't. We took the coast road, which the Nazis and the Facisti had flooded by turning out Pontine Marshes's ditches. So sometimes we were hubcap deep in water, sometimes

Library of Congress

we were on the road. We went up along under the overhanging bluffs, and above I saw the cities of Norma and others. Those actually were Etruscan cities and some of the oldest cities in Italy.

Then, finally, our driver turned up the mountain, we went up. We had one glimpse down of Lake Nemi, which is called Diana's Mirror, just a flashing glance. Then we went by Lago di Albano, and we saw the papal summer villa, the papal palace of Albano. Then we came out on the ridge, and down before us lay the Appian Way. You could see it clearly going right straight across the plain. And on the horizon was Rome! It was one of the most extraordinary sights I ever saw.

But to me the tremendous thing was that we, and all those armies, were rolling up to the gates of Rome and they would open for us. The gates of Rome had always held against the enemy. We weren't the enemy, but still we were armies. We came down the mountain and sped along the Appian way and went through the gates by St. John in Jerusalem and across town to our billet.

The billet was an ex-hotel. The accent is on the ex. I do not know exactly why, but the Office of War Information always seemed to get the most lousy hotels. We were very far down the line evidently. But it was located at the top of the stairs that went down to the annex of the Ambassador Hotel. My chief captain, who had just become "Major" Manley, had taken that building to be our headquarters and had gone through and selected the top, the eighth, floor to be ours, because we were classified and nothing could get at us there if he guarded the staircases.

I met him the next morning and he handed me a key. He said, I grabbed every typewriter in the place because it had been the Ministry of Information for Italy. And I put them all in that room. Go and take the typewriter you want. So I went over, located our place on the eighth floor (which you walk up to, of course), and then went in the room on the main floor.

Library of Congress

There were perhaps 100 typewriters there. Of course, they all had Italian keyboards, well, European keyboards. One was Russian, which did me no good.

I looked at them all. And I said, well, it's war and I can't argue. Let's find the one with the best action. So I tried all the typewriters and I picked an Olivetti. Then I found some soldier to get it up to the top floor and went to work.

And Major Ivor Manley came in. He was a tall man, had been a Welsh Guard. He had been raised in Wales of course. But his family had been closely associated in Italy for over a century. So he spoke perfect Italian, which led to a very entertaining situation. He was in uniform. The Italian cleaning woman said people in uniform did not understand Italian. So whatever Major Manley said to her she didn't understand because he was in uniform. But if he took his uniform off they had wonderful conversations because some civilians could speak Italian.

I knew no Italian at that time, but I did learn some. The office was immediately engaged in putting out the reports on the reactions of the Italians to the allied occupation.

Q: May I ask you was this a report which was used only internally with the forces? Or did it ultimately go out to any of the Italian people themselves?

ABBEY: I would say that neither report went to the Italian people. Because one was on Italia Combata. That's behind the lines and that was highly classified material because it would have been very dangerous if the names of the partisans were given. The second was the analysis of the reaction of the Italian people, and they might not like our reaction to that. So it was entirely for classified use, which of course prevented it going in Italian. It went all over the world to diplomatic and military and naval or air force people.

Q: Okay. Go ahead.

Library of Congress

ABBEY: I stayed in Rome for that year and we put out the report all the time. When I came in, I was the only American woman there. Shortly after that, others came. And we had a very complete staff of Americans and British. In Naples I had known only one American in our division. And that was Lieutenant Domingos. He had charge of something that had to do with the radio, but I wasn't certain. But I do know that he had a very complete file of all of the people. And he kept a very meticulous file.

Major Manley's personal interest was in they political parties. Since Italy had not had any political parties in 20 years they went simply wild. If an Italian wanted to put forth an idea he didn't look for somebody else who had the same idea, he started a new political party. And within the year that I served there, Major Manley had a record of over 6,000 different political parties, of which I'm sure 5,999 duplicated others. However, they all had individual names.

At the end of — well, in March of '45, I was approached by the Secretary to the commanding general, who was General MacCrystal who had been a PR man in America and had gotten his military title from that work. He was primarily a PR man. His secretary was a close personal friend of mine, Violet Dupont. She asked me was I interested in going home when the war was over and my eyes kind of popped. I hadn't even thought of the war ending. Or did I wish to stay on and serve? I said I had joined for the duration or two years. And it had been only one year. So, Yes, I was interested in staying on.

So she told me that I could be on either the German or the Austrian team. My mother was French. I grew up believing “Sal Boche” (Dirty German) was one word, like the Southern “Damnyankee.” I thought I could not do a peacetime job very effectively in that frame of mind. I had better choose Austria, which at that time I could not have told you where it was. So I was put on the Austrian team. Mussolini's Death

In April I had a week's leave down at Capri also with Ms. Dupont. She had been ill. We were there on the island absolutely cut off, no communication, of course. We were

Library of Congress

sitting on the hill side above the marina when we heard this most extraordinary sound. Somebody was yelling, screaming, yelling, screaming. And it was coming nearer and nearer. We watched. And this little man came leaping, jumping, running down the hill. He would fall. He would turn a somersault. He would get up and he would scream in joy and laugh again. And we watched him. And as he came by he said, Mussolini E Muerto (Mussolini is dead). And we looked at each other. Do you suppose it is true? Well, it was though we don't know how he got the word. And we didn't find out officially until we got back to the mainland. But somehow he had heard that Mussolini was dead.

When we got back to the mainland — there was only one boat a day that went from Capri over to Sorrento—we spent the night in the Victoria Hotel and there was a message waiting for Vi Dupont. And she called her headquarters. It was at Caserta, GHQ. And Colonel Robert Shin who was assistant aid to General MacCrystal said, “Vi, come home.” She said, well, I'll have to find a way. But he said, come home. So she got up early and got the bread truck and went to Caserta. I had to spend the day until I got transport.

Germans Surrender in Italy

The next morning I did get transport into Naples, where I had to spend a day or so until I could get transport to Rome. And I went to the OWI headquarters there, the PWB we called it, and waited. I went out to look at Naples and came back about six o'clock. And they said, Ms. Dupont has been trying to reach you every hour. She said it's most important. Well, I couldn't reach her, so I waited. We were just sitting down to dinner when the phone rang. It was Vi. And she said, Denise, I want you to be the first to know the Germans have surrendered. That's why she'd been called back. The Germans were coming in and they had signed the surrender at Caserta that day. And she had been present, of course.

Library of Congress

Well, within five minutes of her talking with me on the phone they began to ring the bells of Naples. The bells hadn't rung since the war began. It was a mad house. The bells everywhere cracked, banged, anything else. They rang and they rang for hours.

The next day I did get transport and I went up to Rome, signed in and was told I was to go on up to Florence as soon as transport could be found. I worked in the office, got myself ready, and finally I was put in well, it was a station wagon; That is, it was actually a truck chassis with a station wagon top. And we drove up to Florence. When we came into Florence, it was in the early afternoon. It was siesta time. It was dead silence. Now, although the Germans had surrendered there had been no public announcement of it. We came through the streets, absolutely silent streets.

We came to the headquarters, which was in a newspaper building because they always took over a newspaper building. And as we drove up and parked suddenly the whole city erupted. It began with every window in the neighborhood, everybody leaning out, screaming, yelling, shrieking, everything else. And we sat and we looked and we wondered what in heavens name had happened. Well, word was out. The Germans had surrendered.

So at that moment three people came out of the office building. One was George Edwards, who had signed me the first time. One was his secretary Nina Cook who'd been the third of our three women and had not known either language so she had been employed there. And the third was Don Minifie.

Don Minifie (James MacDonald Minifie) was actually a Canadian. But he had been assigned with the British and then with us. He had been a very famous reporter, a Pulitzer Prize winner, and had been a reporter from England at the time of the Blitz, lost an eye in the Blitz, as a matter of fact. And had come down with an assignment in Africa and now in Italy, and was second as a civilian to MacCrystal and was assigned to be in charge of the group going up to Austria. That I did not know at the time. But that places him.

Library of Congress

The three people came out of the building. They stopped and they pointed their fingers at me. They said, you. Me? Yes. You will have to prepare the victory party. Well, I knew why. I'm allergic to alcohol. I'd be the only sober person in Italy. They said, you have carte blanche. But get the party ready. Well, I said when and where? They said, well, this is our party and our headquarters for tomorrow night.

They said, there's just one catch. The word is not out officially to the world. And we won't be until the BBC broadcasts tomorrow night. But you've got to have everything ready. If a voice comes on and says, my lords, ladies and gentlemen, his Majesty the King; the war is over. We have the party. If it's just BBC calling, we don't until they bring it up the next night.

So I had the job of preparing the party that would or wouldn't take place. I went with a couple of sergeants the next day and I got an 8th Army British captain with a wonderful handlebar mustache to give me a punch recipe from the Eighth Army—because I figured that there wouldn't be enough bottles, but washtubs full of punch might go. So we were all ready. We were in the hotel Stella d'Italia lobby, which was an upstairs lobby because downstairs was a Singer office and other offices. And we waited. And everybody, of course, glass in hand. Was it or wasn't it a party? BBC came on and a very well known voice said, my lords, ladies and gentlemen, his Majesty the King. And there wasn't a sound in that place through George's short speech. He managed his stutter, his difficulty very well. He spoke slowly and clearly. But when he stopped hell broke loose.

Well, I saw the party underway and at about eleven o'clock I went up and locked my door. The South Africans had moved in and I was not having anything further to do with it.

Well, that was in Naples. No, that was in Florence I should say. And I was in Florence for about a week. And then I was sent up to Milan because I was to go up to Austria. I spent a week in Milan and saw the place where Mussolini and his mistress' bodies had been found. And the place was streaming with partisans. It was a fascinating sight to see

Library of Congress

because they had the Alpine leather shorts on. The shortest shorts I have ever seen. I suppose they'd been worn off all through the years. And every last one of them with a machine gun. The week in Milan went by and then I was sent back —

Q: I thought you were in Florence.

ABBEY: Pardon me. Milan. I was from Milan. I'd gone from Florence to Milan you see. So they sent me back to Florence since the travel party would start from there. There I had an experience too which I will report. Before in Rome one of our employees was a man named Hans Cohrssen, C-O-H-R-S-S-E-N. He was an economist and had come over with OWI and he was always working in the Italian economy. He was a very short man with very bushy hair and a temper like nobody's business. He could not stand chicanery and the rest of it. So he was always in trouble. We crossed swords at the beginning. I had only to see him and I would go up in smoke too.

He came into — well, we had an opportunity to change some offices. And I had been in this cold, cold office. And I knew there was one with sun in it just emptied. I grabbed everything I could and I rushed down and put things around and sat down. He came right in behind me. But I was already seated. He was furious, but I stayed. A few weeks after that he came in and said, I have a problem. I have found that one of the embassy officers has taken a villa for his lady friend. And this house happens to be sheltering a lot of orphans. I have written him and told him that he should get another house and he hasn't answered. I've written him again and now I'm going to go to the ambassador.

I said, well, of course, that's your privilege. Are you sure he got the letters? No, I can't be sure. I said, if you put in that ultimatum the ambassador has no choice but to take some action and there's no way of going back. I suggest that you write him again and tell him the situation and say "I have written you twice. This is the third time. If I do not hear from you in three days I shall have to go to the ambassador."

Library of Congress

He came back the next day. He said, it worked. He's taking another house and the orphans stay there. That was good.

But when I was in Florence he came into my office again. I was ready to fight. He said, I want to ask a favor of you. Would you go with me to Austria as my assistant? You have your ideas and I have mine. I'll never ask you to change your mind. I said, on that basis I'll go with you. From that moment on we clicked. And we made a team. And I think it had a very great effect on some of the things that happened. But I had to wait my chance to go to Austria until a group of women was going. So he had gone up ahead.

Abbey Moves to Austria

On the 14th of June, another 14th of June, six of us went in another station wagon bus up over the Brenner Pass and on the way we had a rare experience. We met the German Army in retreat under a couple of MPs. There was a long train of German vehicles with German officers of every rank in them. And at the front was an MP and at the end was an MP. They were surrendering. They were prisoners of war. That's all the guards there were. We'd have to somehow share the road and get past them. Then we began to overtake the American army going up in trucks, up into Austria and Germany. The trucks would be full of these dusty soldiers sitting there, you know. And the one on the tailgate would look and see the station wagon and yell "girls!" Then everybody in that truck, everybody in the next truck would pick it up and stare and cheer. We went by to a constant stream of greeting and wolf whistles.

Well, we got to the Brenner Pass proper, the line of demarcation, the Americans were in charge. Two weeks later we would turn it over to the French because we shared our territory with them when they demanded to be recognized. But at that time we were in charge. And the man in charge there was absolutely floored. He hadn't had any women through before. We said, we need a restroom. And he was floored again. So he grabbed two MPs and put one on either end of the hall and we used the restrooms.

Library of Congress

We had some lunch and went on through the Brenner Pass and went down into Innsbruck and then turned and went on to Salzburg. We came into Salzburg at sunset, of course one of the most beautiful sights in the whole world. Salzburg had been bombed a little but not very badly. It had been saved, of course, by the man who later became the head of military government. Because he said, like he said of Rothenburg, there's no point to, it's being destroyed. It's not a military place. So only an accidental bomb or two had hit it. One hit the cathedral. We came in there and for once we had a decent hotel. I don't know how it happened. But it did. It was the Bristol Hotel right by the Trinity Church, and we stayed there.

I was assigned, as I say, to the radio section under Hans Cohns. Well, I knew nothing about radio. Hans Cohns didn't know anything about radio either. And he told Minnie that when Minnie said, will you come to Austria as head of my radio? He said, but I know nothing about radio. And Minnie said, no, but I can trust you. And I soon learned what he meant. Because there was more chicanery, more ex-Nazis doing this and that and the other thing. Because Salzburg was of course among the greatest centerpiece of Nazism there was.

But it was true. Hans Cohns was and is the finest American citizen I have ever known. He had come from Germany as a young man, brought his family over, married, had two children. Later in Austria he fell in love with an Austrian girl. Instead of just shacking up he went back home, told his wife. They arranged a divorce and to this day he supports members of that family. He married the girl and they have lived very happily ever since. She is a well known actress. And I think they had one or two children at any rate.

Well, going back further. Let me finish on Hans Cohns. When he left us a year later he went into the founding of Radio Free Europe and he was with Radio Free Europe for a number of years. He finally did not like their policy and he left them. But he is still

Library of Congress

working to build up a better radio TV connection between Europe and America, and he has arranged different programs, especially with the culturally inclined U.S. stations.

Q: Has he stayed on then in Austria or Germany ever since that time? He never came back to the States?

ABBEY: Yes, Hans Cohnsen stayed on. That of course presented certain difficulties in the early days because he was a naturalized citizen. I had occasion to write a letter on two occasions asking that his citizenship not be removed because he was doing a job that was badly needed. And he was such a fine citizen. Then, of course, the law was changed and he was not endangered. He makes his headquarters in Frankfurt. He comes back and forth a great deal. He's over 80 now. But he's still a bundle of energy and that hair is still as bushy as ever. And I imagine he still has the temper. But he is a devoted and dedicated American citizen for the promotion of America. And I have never known a finer one.

OWI Establishes Radio Austria in Salzburg

He set up the radio in Austria on the 6th of June in 1944. And of course they had nothing to program. But they just had to put something on the air somehow. Now, it was radio in the German language because that's the language of Austria radio under the American control in the American section. Each nation had one. And when we divided our territory and gave France Vorarlberg and Tyrol they set up radio down there, Radio Dornbirn. The Russians, of course, had the main ones in Vienna. But they also had the whole of the —

Q: This was in Salzburg?

ABBEY: No, this was Austria.

Q: I mean, Salzburg, Austria.

ABBEY: Salzburg, Austria, yes. That was the American headquarters. We had Salzburg and Upper Austria. And the Russians had Lower Austria and Burgenland and the British

Library of Congress

had Steiermark and Carinthia. Each section had a radio in German language supervised by that particular country. Salzburg was until that fall the headquarters for Red-White-Red which then moved to Vienna and has been there ever since and the branch stations continue in Salzburg and Linz.

There was very little programming material available. The Americans came in with records and things. But we found in those stations something which we had never had in America, and that was tape recorders. I became introduced to them the first day I went to work in radio in Austria. They were a source of wonder to us, because we had had wire recorders like that. We used great 16-inch records. But the tapes, of course, became the thing and have grown naturally ever since. The thing that Mr. Cohn did which was unique and which had a tremendous effect for all America, was that he dreamed up the idea that there was not anywhere in Europe helping all of those thousands, even millions, of lost people who had been separated from their homes, their families, everything, by the German treatment of the Jews and others like that. How were they going to find their people? So he set up what was called Suchmeldungen. That is searching calls. And three-quarters or more of the programs on Red- White-Red in the early days consisted of people coming in and saying, for instance "I am Hans Friedman." I come from so and so. I'm looking for so and so. And they would broadcast that information. And from somewhere the answer would come back. And literally millions of people found their homes, found their people, found some connection through that Suchmeldungen.

It was first tried in Austria. It was taken up by other nations, because it was so impossibly important.

Q: Did you then act as the clearing house? Or once you had established the contact between the people, did they find their own way to get back together?

ABBEY: They found their own way. All we could do was provide a place where they could get the information as to where somebody was or where they were so the people would

Library of Congress

find out. And that service went on in declining length of period for years, because they didn't solve the problem anywhere in a hurry.

But our office, and I sat in the middle of that for weeks, was full of people coming in and going to a desk and telling about themselves or saying I'm looking for so and so. We would get letters from America. We are trying to find so and so. We broadcast the information and then passed it on. Mostly it was done by word of mouth and mostly it was done by the people themselves. But we provided a place where it could be broadcast. And shortly after Hans started it then it was done in other countries of Europe, but probably never as greatly and fully as it was done in Austria because it was our brain child you might say. The "our" is Austrian, not mine.

Q: Did you ever have any tangible expressions of appreciation for this kind of service that was given to you by the Austrians and/or other people who were utilizing your facilities to make these contacts?

ABBEY: We had an endless verbal danke schoen (thanks) or danke viel mals (thanks very much). I didn't understand—it was "dunk a field mouse" to me and I couldn't see what was happening to the poor mouse for months until I found out it was "thank you very much." I'm sure there were written records. But it was a verbal thing. It was an enormous thing. It was an intangible that became tangible more by expression. But there was one young German, Helmut Dantine, who had come over to America as a movie actor. He found his parents through us, and he was so grateful because he had had no way — he couldn't get to the country and find them. Of course, that was one of the major difficulties. There was so little physical contact. That was the main thing.

Q: Did some of the contacts that you established and the people who found each other then come from Germany as well as from Austria? Although technically you were broadcasting over Austrian facilities?

Library of Congress

ABBEY: Well, yes. I would say that some did. We were handling for Austria and probably Munich was handling for Munich. But for the people there's very little distinctive line. There's no physical line. And so, yes, we would say we had a certain amount of it. And certainly a lot of the people in Austria would have come from Germany or they would have lost their people in Germany because of the Nazis moving everybody hither and yon. And between the armies and the rest of it. Yes. But we were handling for Austria primarily.

We brought in American programs. We brought in recorded programs. But of course we had to translate. The first thing we did was set up a news program. Of course, Hans's German was flawless. He kept a sharp eye on the news because that would be a place where it could be doctored. And we had a certain amount of problems because we had to have experienced employees, and most of them had been working with the Nazis. And, of course, there "wasn't a Nazi in Austria," in quotation marks. But I'm afraid there were many certainly in intent.

We had certain problems. We would get orders from CIC to fire somebody because he'd been a Nazi. And we had very little recourse. I had one case though where I objected. I received orders to fire the head of my news section and the head of my business section. Those men I knew had been in concentration camps. One had lost a leg there. There was no question about it. So I took the one course that might be open to me. I asked to see the evidence. And the evidence came in the form of telephone monitor clippings because all telephone calls of course were monitored. And I read the clippings. And then I had my answer.

The Americans had restaurants or hotels where any employee of the Army could get a mid-day meal. The main one for our section happened to be in a restaurant called Es ist! Es ist! Es ist which is from a famous story of this place which has the most wonderful wine: "it is, it is, it is." But the monitor was unaware of that. And all he heard was I'll meet you at

Library of Congress

the SS. So I said I did not feel that attendance at an army mess hall was occasion for firing him.

Q: They had mistaken that for the SS.

ABBEY: Surely. The monitor simply didn't know that. So when I said I did not feel that dining at an army mess hall was a reason for firing the person, I kept my two people. The programs—I was shortly after I got there assigned a job of providing one hour a month, an American program which we would create there. And I created them for a couple of years. The first time I did a program called “This Is America.”

Q: And you were writing the programs.

ABBEY: Yes. This was something I had never done. But I wrote the program. I had it translated. I had to double over them to be sure they got the translation correct because my German was non-existent. And then I watched the direction of it to be sure that they got it done. And I did “This is America.” It was 13 shows, 13 divisions of America including music, history, folklore and other things. And that was one year. The second year I did a series of programs, plays, radio plays, on the — well, the history of the United States beginning with the first Thanksgiving and working right down through the Matanuska Valley in Alaska and doing a program for each one. As I've said often since then, when I think how many people it takes to make a radio program or a TV program today, and there I sat and did the whole works for a whole country for two years! At any rate, they were appreciated. Some of them were copied and used elsewhere.

The work largely, of course, I had to do it through an interpreter. And that led to something. I wanted then to learn German. And so I was trying very hard. At that time we were having very rapid changes in our commanding officers. General MacCrystal had never come up to Austria. We kept getting this man or that man. And we had a certain Colonel Grogan. And he hauled me on the carpet. I didn't know what I had done. He said, you're learning German. I said, yes. He said, what do you mean by learning German? You've got

Library of Congress

interpreters. I said, but I have 120 employees almost none of whom speak English. Well, they should work with interpreters. Well, I happen to know how many of the interpreters were ex-Nazis—if there was an “ex.” He didn't flatly refuse to let me learn German. He didn't order me not to. He certainly thoroughly disapproved of it. But I continued to learn German and I went on with it because I didn't see how I could deal with 120 people who didn't speak English if I didn't speak any of their language. And so I did learn to speak German. I made many Austrian friends and learned German with them.

In the end when I came back here [Washington] and had to take the test on foreign languages, I left the instructors so dazed they didn't know what had happened. They had never heard more German in less time, more vocabulary and less grammar in any of their experiences. I'll tell you that I did later have a chance for five years of instruction in the language, and I cleared up a great deal. But I never will speak German perfectly because I learned it by ear. They said why don't you speak more slowly? I said, I can't. I don't know what I'm saying unless I say it fast.

Transfer to Vienna—Work with Austro-American Institute of Education

At any rate, I made many Austrian friends and I still have many Austrian friends. I go back almost every year. I was transferred to Vienna finally. And I became associated with the Austro-America Institute of Education which had been founded in 1926 by a Dr. Dengler and still serves as one of the great sources for exchange between the two countries. I set up a lecture series there, gave courses towards easier English.

I had with me an English woman because all of the Austrians had learned English from English people and the American accent was kind of strange to them. So by having the two of us we could explore the differences in the language. And that is also one of the difficulties when they had learned from this one teacher then they could understand the teacher perfectly but they didn't know what anybody else was saying. So that helped to solve that problem.

Library of Congress

I worked with the Austro-American Institute of Education all the years I was in Austria. I have continued ever since then. A group of former American officers in Austria formed the Friends of the Austro-American Institute of Education and Cultural Affairs, Dr. E. Wilder Spalding, D. Emil Spitzer of the International Bank, and Robert Bauer, and others of the group who formed the Friends. I'm meeting with them this Wednesday, as a matter of fact. I'm probably the only survivor of the original group. Because Dr. Spalding has agreed to stay on but Dr. Spitzer is not well enough. And we have tried to promote the better understanding through the Austro-American Institute of Education.

I served in Salzburg that summer temporarily, then I was hastily called up to Vienna again on the 14th of September there's something about the 14th! And I had a funny experience on the way up. They said you have to come. You have to come. We're crazy. Come. Get any transport. So I found a major who was going up to Vienna on Monday and I rode up with him in his jeep. We went through the Russian lines of course, and two or three times between Inns and Vienna a Russian soldier came out on the road and held up his hand, touched his wrist and held up five. He would give me \$500 for a wrist watch, any watch. I didn't have one to spare. But that was going on and it happened. And it was \$500 not \$5. The watches were absolutely incredibly in demand. Even a Mickey Mouse version would have been worth a fortune.

I got to Vienna. I went into our office which was in what is now the Wiener Kurier Building. (We founded the Wiener Kurier there) and said here I am! Where's all the work. And Don Minifie who was there in charge looked at me. And he said, oh, yes, yes, yes. Take a letter. And I got a pencil and my book and he said, address it to Colonel Charles Beauchamp, the British Information Officer. And he said, "Dear Charles, thank you for two bottles of mustard." And that was all the work I did for ten weeks. I nearly went mad. So after two or three days finding that there was nothing happening I asked Mr. Minifie if he'd have any objections if I went to Berlitz and took German lessons. He said, no. In fact, I'll go with you. So we went to Berlitz for some weeks.

Library of Congress

Then Don had a coronary and he was in the hospital. He had taken ill on the train and was taken to a hospital in Linz. And then they transferred him to Salzburg which was the leading hospital. He had been going to go down to Rome. Because before the war he had been in Rome with his family and they had a lot of stuff in storage and he wanted to get it moved. So I went down to Salzburg to visit him and I said, "Don, would it help any if I went to Rome and supervised the moving?" He said, "yes." So I got the orders.

Q: Let me ask you. I'm not quite clear what his position was now.

ABBEY: Don Minifie had come up as deputy for General MacCrystal, chief of all the PWB which after the war was called ISB—Information Services Branch.

Q: Was he still in the military at that time?

ABBEY: No.

Q: He was a civilian.

ABBEY: Like me he was in uniform, but he was a civilian.

Q: I see.

ABBEY: He had been born a Canadian. He came up with the English. And he came up to us because he had served so long in America and General MacCrystal wanted him. I think MacCrystal trusted him. He was a very great patriot. So let me see. I got orders to go down to Rome and I was to pick up material for the Christmas. We were going to make Christmas for the children.

I was given a truck and an American sergeant to drive down to Rome, especially to get oranges for the children for the Christmas party. We drove down to Rome. It was December. We stayed in Rome for three days where I did what I was supposed to do for Don, get his materials. And I also used the Red Cross telephone to telephone home which

Library of Congress

was very interesting. Because I used my three nights until after midnight sitting there trying to — not that I didn't have my turn on the phone. But they couldn't get the word through. And finally on the last possible call when they were shutting up shop I did get through. And so I had my Christmas greetings home.

We started back with several crates of oranges and a lot of other surprises and drove up to Florence and then on to Verona. At Verona we stopped on the outskirts of town where there was a gas point, and picked up gasoline. And it was a December night. The moon was rising. Under the tailgate of that truck we heated some water on an alcohol stove. And I thought, well, this is one kind of Romeo and Juliet!

Then we started up and we ran into a snow storm. We were trying to reach a place in the hills, San Silvestro, where there was an Army rest stop. It was snowing heavier and harder and harder. But we somehow found a way, and we finally got to the place. The sergeant in charge was dumbfounded because we were the only people there. And he said, well, you can have all the blankets you want at any rate. And we needed them. Oh, it was cold there. The next morning was brilliant sunshine. We started out and got back on the main highway. That at least was partially cleared.

We had not gone very far when we ran into a convoy, the first convoy of German POWs being returned to Germany over the Brenner, which is the lowest pass. One of the trucks had slid around in the snow, and was off the side. And a large crane by the name of "Violet" was trying to get it out. So the men in charge got their trucks to one side and we went on to the Brenner.

Of course, the French were in charge up there. And they were always very persnickety. They didn't know. We were on the English side of the lines because that was the English side, and they didn't know our credentials. We didn't have this pass they wanted and we didn't have that thing which we should have. First of all the officer wasn't there. He was out at lunch. So we had to wait. Then when he came back he wasn't sure either. All of a

Library of Congress

sudden a messenger came in. He said, there's a German convoy and it's stuck down the road. And we could have driven a herd of elephants through from that point on. The man just shoved us out and we went on and came down into Austria.

We came to Innsbruck and went on to the French border, and had to stop and produce our papers. By that time it was dark and quite late. Well, not really I suppose. It was six or seven o'clock. But the dark came early. I stayed in the truck, and my driver went in. And I heard motion in the back of the truck. And he came out. And I said, look, somebody's in the back of the truck.

He went back and opened it up. They'd stolen our suitcases and some other things. I didn't know I knew so much French. But I demanded to see the officer in charge. Well, he was gone. I said I demand to see him. I'm an American officer. So finally to get rid of me he took me over. The man was in his bedroom slippers, having dinner with his family. And I just stormed at him—in French—here we are allies. I come to you and I get robbed. I said, I was robbed. And I just raved. He finally got on his clothes and got busy. And on the way back to the post my sergeant had found our suitcases on one side. Well, then the man believed me. And he rapped out two or three orders. And I want to tell you in no time at all our things were brought back.

Q: Had they taken any of them?

ABBEY: Well, they didn't have time for anything. I lost three shirts and what looked like a wallet but was actually a bunch of pictures of my baby nephew. But other than that, the stuff came back. Oh, I was furious. I just raved. I didn't know I knew that much French. And three days later, I must tell you, the French liaison officer in Salzburg came and apologized. We got into Salzburg that night, and we had a wonderful Christmas party and that was all right. I stayed in Salzburg until February of '47 at which point I transferred up to the radio office in Vienna.

Library of Congress

Now, when we first came in, in June of '45 the great event in Austria, musical event, had always been the Salzburg Festival. And so we undertook to get it underway somehow and arranged to broadcast it all over Europe. We offered it free. Well, of course, there weren't that many programs. Nobody was going to refuse it. So they managed to put on a Salzburg Festival. We got an American girl to be a pianist. We brought her up from Italy. And she played. So we had an American artist at the thing.

And then the next year, Hans Cohrssen was gone. And I was in charge of the recording and placing of the Salzburg Festival. The third year I went to Belgium and France and London to place it with different radios. And so we did place it there. Of course the festival was improving all the time, and it still was historically very famous.

Abbey Transferred from Radio Work

And then that fall our chief was down in Italy or someplace like that. And his assistant, whom I will not name for obvious reasons as I go on, called me in the office. He said, Ms. Abbey we're not satisfied with your work. I'm not going to discharge you but I'm going to transfer you. Since I had just received and was continuing to receive letters from all over Europe thanking for the efficiency with which the Salzburg Festival had been handled and everything else I didn't take him too seriously. But I certainly was not improved in feeling. And then he said you can report to Captain Wilson on Tuesday morning because it was Labor Day weekend.

So I went back to Red-White-Red and I called my officers together. I said I have been transferred under circumstances which mean I will never enter this office again except on invitation. It has nothing to do with you. But I will never come in here again except on invitation. I cleaned up my whole desk and on Tuesday morning reported to Captain Wilson in what was still called the "prop shop" (propaganda).

The Work and Impact of The Vienna Information Center

Library of Congress

But that wasn't the right name for it. But it was the information center in its beginning. Jack Wilson was a man who knew a great deal about publicity and things like that. When I came in he said, Denise, I think you've had a raw deal. I'd like you to enjoy yourself here. What do you want to do? I said, well, what do you need? He said, what I need is an English secretary. I said, I'll do your secretarial work but please don't call me that because it reduces me in rank. And he said, well, no. I'll be grateful. Because I only have a German language secretary.

So I did for two or three days. He gave me a desk in the middle of a very large room which was the reading room of the information center where all the newspapers and books and everything were. We at that time were having between 30 000 and 60,000 people a month come into that place to get books and magazines or to read the papers. It was the busiest place that I'd imagine.

Q: Now, whose library was this? Was this a native library?

ABBEY: This was the American library. The information center. It was the outgrowth of the old prop shops.

Q: I see.

ABBEY: We had newspapers and books. And at that time we were just beginning our translation program. They were just beginning to put things out. And we would get the publisher and then he would bring out a book. Then of course we'd keep a certain number of copies in the library and the rest would go on sale.

Q: Now, were they — the books then that you had were entirely in English up to that point.

ABBEY: Yes, except certain books usually by American authors—Jack London, Hawthorne, Mark Twain, etc., from German libraries which we put in because, of course,

Library of Congress

the people didn't speak that much English. But all during the years we kept getting more and more books translated into German. The translation program was really enormous.

Q: Pardon me. But how did they — you said they had thousands of people coming in. If they didn't understand English what did they get out of it? How did they manage it?

ABBEY: Two things. The newspapers which we had and the German language newspapers which we were publishing. Of course, we brought them in from different places where they could get American background papers. Then books in English because a lot of people, the older ones especially, did read English. And as the time went on more and more of the young people knew English. And so they came and read them. And then some of them came frankly to keep warm in the winter. We might as well be honest. But they came. And we had a tremendous requirement for the books.

It's rather interesting. The very first book which the Americans put out in German was put out in the newspapers as soon as they started in Austria. It was *Gone With the Wind*. And it was also the first book we then published. And to this day it remains the most popular book. We never had enough copies on the shelves.

Q: At this point, I gather that all the newspapers that were being published either in Germany or in Austria were those that had been originated after the war by American sponsorship.

ABBEY: Yes, they were, or by other allies. I don't know if there were any older papers but if there were they were under new management obviously. But mostly they were entirely new names which of course by today are old names. And in Austria we had the *Wiener Kurier*. It was then the *Wiener Kurier*. Today it's just the *Kurier*.

And then we had, of course, papers the British, the French and the others put out so we'd have more variety. And one day, I had not been there very long when Jack Nelson came to my desk and he dropped three big envelopes of photographs on my desk. One thing

Library of Congress

we were always getting from America were photographs. Also we had a big photographic section which produced quantities of photographs of Austrian activities that had an American association or American background.

What he put on my desk were three big envelopes of 8 X 10s about the aluminum industry. Now, Austria has some of the biggest aluminum deposits in the world. And they had been opened up and were working. And these three envelopes, one was the mines themselves, two was the development and use of it and the third was the transport and export of aluminum.

He said, I want you to make three windows out of that. Well, I'd never made a "window" in my life. And he said, go on. Just take the picture. Make your windows with that. So I sorted the pictures and I worked them out. And I finally sketched out and put on his desk what I planned. And he said, fine. That's your job. Do the windows now.

Well, we had about ten windows in that big corner shop which is right behind the opera in Vienna. And we had that always as the information center until Austria became a nation and we then gave up that big development. But that corner of Kaertnerstrasse and the opera was one of the busiest corners in Vienna. And it had these great windows.

He gave me the job and I had a studio. And I had very good artists. I had to design and do the windows. My main project was showing either American influence in Austria or America itself.

Q: You had this position after you had left the radio station?

ABBEY: Yes.

Q: As a result of your having been — I won't say fired — from the radio program, you got into this cultural and information work in Vienna.

Library of Congress

ABBEY: Yes. Well, now this is where things really began to develop. Because in those days since nobody knew exactly what we were supposed to do, if you had a good idea you could try it. And we did. From those pictures I developed my first windows. And I almost always used pictures in there and something using the pictures. But I soon had a tremendous stock of pictures. And I had a very conscious and conscientious assistant. A German woman by birth, an Austrian citizen then. And she said the teachers are desperate for learning material. Suppose we should set up a loan of these pictures. Because all we do is just collect them by the thousands. And that was all right except of course all the captions were in English. So I soon had a translation section. And we translated all the captions into German and typed them and put them on the racks. Then we notified the teachers and they would come in and they would go through our stacks of pictures and borrow them in quantities and take them out for a week or a month, whatever they needed and bring them back. If I needed more copies then I went to our photographic section. And we ended up with over 60,000 photographs, and an enormous loan section.

Then we had films. They were the American films and almost always, of course, in English, but they were available. So I had a whole film section set up. And we had a little priest who came in who lived in the Russian section. He came in on a bicycle. And he said, I want to borrow films and I will show them in the Russian section. Marvelous. So he did. And when we wrote up our annual report we were so pleased to tell about how the little priest from Stinkenbrunnen had done all this work. And we got a rap from headquarters. You don't have to be funny about a serious thing. Funny about Stinkenbrunnen? Means just what it sounds like of course. But it was the real name of the place, we couldn't change it. There's an Oberstinkenbrunnen. So we wrote back and said that we were not going to make a liar out of the man.

Q: Were these all commercial American films?

ABBEY: They were documentaries.

Library of Congress

Q: *I see.*

ABBEY: All documentaries. We didn't have any what you would call commercial films, or entertainment films, at all. They were coming into the Austrian market very slowly because, of course, of the language problem. But later they did get them translated, and they did commercially bring them out. But ours were in English and they were documentaries, but of many, many kinds.

Q: *How did you manage to make them comprehensible to the Austrians? Was there over voicing?*

ABBEY: No, they were just played. Usually the person who took them explained about them. The people were so fascinated. And the pictures — documentaries are so often self-explanatory. In some cases I think we did put a photo with it or a sheet with it to cover material. But it was generally speaking they just were hungry for films. They were hungry for books.

Then another program was started and I had a double hand in that. Warren Robbins, who later was the founder of the African Museum here was one of our cultural officers there. And he started a magazine for teachers of English. It was a small publication but it was very, very popular, and we had really a tremendous list.

He came to me one day and he said, Denise, would you do a section in English for the younger people? Of course all my life I'd wanted to write and that thrilled me. So I did. And I named our section "Young People." Not a children's or things like that. Because young people of any age can read that, and we often saw it in the hands of old men and old women, young people. I put that out for two years. Then in the book translation section they decided that they would do a special section on children's books. And that is a whole field. Let me see how I'll start with that.

Library of Congress

Founding of a Section of Children's Books

When we came in there were, of course, no books for children and there were none in particular on the translation list. They did get some in. We put them in our library. I began to urge that there should be a children's library. Well, I got no support on that. Jack Wilson didn't give a darn about it. He wanted to get the books out but little kids could read what was there. And I kept wanting a children's library.

One day this woman came in who had been a refugee. She was a rather noted woman in Austrian education, a Dr. Minna Lachs. She came in and said, now, where is your children's library? And Jack said, well, we don't have one. No children's library? That's one of the most important things. Those are the people of tomorrow and so forth. And she went on and on. When she went out Jack turned to me and said, all right. Get your damn library.

Well, I had hoped and hoped and I had been working with Theresa Druml who was the American head of the library, an American woman with an Austrian background. I had prepared a list of books that I thought would be a basic list for a children's library. So when Jack actually said the words I rushed around and got that typed up and sent it back to the States.

We got word that it would be coming, and that was fine, but where were we going to put it? We literally didn't have an inch of room in the place. We were built around what we call an atrium but it was a court. And I had a bright idea. We roofed the court and we built a second floor. And of course they had a big support in the middle of it. So I decorated it with red and white streamers like a circus tent. And it had our children's library. It was the first one in Austria, practically the first in Europe, and it was absolutely overrun. It was just the joy of the teachers and the students. And, of course, they were the ones who were growing up. Sure, then they were kids. But that's been a good many years ago. Now they are the leaders. And they have always been friends and readers of the American library.

Library of Congress

They had been influenced in a very important time by very good books in the American section.

So then the translation section decided that they would publish every month two American young people's books, and I gave them a logo. Two 12-13 year olds, boy and a girl, sitting on stacks of books back to back, reading. And that became the logo for these books. For several years they were put out. So there was a good stack of classic American young people and children's books that came out under that logo. So between the children's magazine and those books I had the time of my life. I recommended some of the titles. But they gave me a choice of three or four titles and I said, those two I like best.

Q: Now, was this then — this was an Austrian publishing house then that was putting these out at that time.

ABBEY: The Austrian publishing houses, plural. Yes, but you see we gave them support and got the translations done. And as I say, our book translation section was an enormous section and there's a whole world of books that we got put out in German.

Q: As a matter of curiosity, do you know whether these books put out by this outfit primarily, initially for your library ultimately were distributed on a commercial basis through Austria?

ABBEY: They always were. We only took a certain percentage of them. They always were put out. It was a commercial project of which we took a certain number of books and which we backed. But it was a commercial project. But they never would have published the number of books that we enabled them to do. And we always took a big section.

Q: These were essentially at least at the beginning with an American oriented theme.

ABBEY: Well, they were always American books. And yes, early they were American oriented themes. But they were books that were put out at the suggestion of the

Library of Congress

department, the libraries here. And only once in a while were there other books. Now, as books came out in German we would take them in until it became the law that we could have only books by American authors. Because we had a number of books, especially travel and animal books, which were by famous Europeans, but were unquestionable as far as politics went. But when we were told that we must not do that, we must only have books by Americans, then we had to get rid of those.

A rather funny thing happened and I think it ought to be known. I was in the end transferred down to Linz and head of the Amerika Haus. The word Amerika Haus came in from Germany. They called them "unser Amerikahaus" (our American Houses), Amerika Haus, meaning information centers. And it finally became the official name for it. We objected in Austria because the Russians used it too. But, okay, it became the law and it still is.

At any rate I was in Linz and I got notice I must come to Vienna for a very important meeting. I must bring my librarians with me. It was terribly important. So we went up and they gathered all of the information center libraries personnel from the American Zone. And we were in this big room. What were we there for? What's happened? They said, we have been studying the lists of the books and everything else. And we find that of all the books that have been published or used in the libraries unquestionably the most popular book has been *Gone With the Wind*. We all knew that. What was the question? How do we make another book just as popular? Well, how do you answer that?

So somebody would try and answer. And it went around. It finally got down to me. And I said, well, I don't know what this question is about. If you will get another book as interesting then you will have similar success. Nobody thought of that.

Q: Who was asking this question?

ABBEY: Washington was.

Library of Congress

Q: *Oh.*

ABBEY: Well, there's never been another book of that impact.

Q: *Pardon me. Also, were you still operating under the Department of the Army at that time?*

ABBEY: Let me see. No, by that time I was in Linz so it was '53-'54.

Q: *So you were under State then until it became USIA.*

ABBEY: Well, '53-'54 we were on the way to being USIA. But as I say this question was in its way so ridiculous and so serious that no wonder we didn't know how to answer it. But they haven't yet found another book; that's still the most popular book on the shelves.

Exhibits and Little Theater

I served in the field of graphic display. I did everything in Vienna and a lot for other places and also exhibits. We brought in exhibits. One of the first exhibits we ever brought in was Grandma Moses. And Dr. Otto K who is the man who made Grandma Moses famous, he was Viennese, he brought it in and we sponsored the exhibit. It was tremendously popular. And, of course, there have been countless exhibits since then and the Freedom Drain came, things like that.

But we had a theater and we put on American musical programs. We put on different productions of different kinds. I actually had a part in the first American folk opera "Down in the Valley." It was fully American and I was just one of the chorus, but I was seriously reprimanded for taking part. And I said, well, I've been in the little theater up here all the time. Why now suddenly this? Well, this is our thing.

Q: *This is what?*

Library of Congress

ABBEY: This is ours you see. So I don't know why that made a difference. They shouldn't have an American in it. But at any rate, it was all Americans in it. Then I worked in the little theater but that was my personal choice. We had a little theater at the American USO center which was in a former palace.

Let's see. Then at the end of '53, no in '53, I was transferred out of graphic display. And a man named Ted Culver was brought in. And they divided up my office. They put the films in another section. They put the pictures in another section. I don't know. Five or six people running what we had run in the one office there.

Women's Affairs

And I was put in charge of something called women's affairs. I think they made it up for me except there was such an office in Germany. I went over to Germany to talk to them over there. But I was given no program. I had to dream it up.

And my only thought I had on it was to try to indicate to the Austrian women some ways in which they could help themselves and ease their lives. And I do mean that literally. Because an Austrian woman unless she was married had no rights whatsoever. They couldn't deny her food tickets but she had no housing rights. She had to sublet from someone. She couldn't go to the housing office and get a place to live. And that, of course, included unmarried women, widows and women who didn't know what they were because their husbands hadn't come back from the war. And that's an awful lot of women.

I suggested that one solution might be to have part time jobs. Oh, no. You can't do that. Why not? Because socialism doesn't permit it. You can't have it. I suggested that they might be hired by one company who would take care of all that mechanics like that and placed temporarily. No, no. The reason there — they hadn't done it. That was in those days the great stumbling block in Austria whatever you brought up if it hadn't been done, it couldn't be done.

Library of Congress

Q: These were the Austrian authorities telling you this?

ABBEY: Oh, no. The people that I was trying to work with. The Austrian authority never got that far you see. They simply said Austrian law didn't allow them to do this and didn't allow them to do that. It also so deprived them initiative they didn't want to try to find out if they could do it. I suggested part-time jobs. No, you can't. The Austrian law does not permit that. Well, that was true enough because you had them all in the Social Security things. And the part-time work didn't cover it. And the idea of one firm having the people take care of all of that was unheard of. Well, of course, it's become so now. But at that time it was not possible.

And I suggested that what they had to do everyday was shop for everything because they had no refrigeration. I said you should get refrigeration. Oh, it's too expensive. Well, then couldn't a bunch of people, all the people on the floor have one refrigerator? Oh, no. People would steal everything.

The Austrian attitude was for many years simply if it hasn't been done it can't be done. Why? Because it's never been done. That's the answer. You go around a vicious circle. Once in a while you'd reach somebody who'd say, well, it might be done. And there was the hope for Austria.

So I worked for a year in women's affairs. And then I was called in the office and they said they had a problem down in Linz in the information center there. The public affairs officer was in charge of the whole thing and nobody could get on with him. And they simply had nobody who would go down to the Amerika Haus. And they said would I undertake it. I said, well, I can get along with the devil in hell if I have to. Yes, I'll take it. So I went down and I had a year in Linz. And the public affairs officer was really very difficult. He was former U.S. Col. Henry Siemer, a Prussian by birth, though American citizen, of course.

Q: What city was this?

Library of Congress

ABBEY: Linz, a city in Austria. But I did get on with him. I held the fort for a year. And then they finally woke up that I'd been nine years in Austria. So they transferred me to Germany. Gave me home leave and I went to Germany.

Now, I want to make a couple of statements here. I always felt that my job was informational. I never felt it was propaganda. I hated the word. My job was to explain America, information, influence as far as I could that people would understand us and if what we had was good they might adopt it. I never liked to work in propaganda.

When I went to Germany I had overcome my feelings that I had had, the Sal Boche and the rest of it. I was willing to go and to do as good a job as possible. But I have always felt that the important thing to do was to bring information, cultural information, understanding. And I never got along with the propaganda end of it. And as times change, as the period of life change, as the war was further and further in the background I can understand the change in it. I was not the person to adapt to it too fully. I'm glad I retired when I did.

Q: Let's stop at this point

Germany

Q: All right. When we stopped for lunch we left you when you were just being recalled to the United States after having been in Austria for nine years. So will you now pick it up from here and let's go forward with your experiences thereafter.

ABBEY: After home leave I was sent to Germany as scheduled, going first to Bonn for a week and then down to Stuttgart for further assignment to one of their sub-posts. In this case Mannheim. A very important commercial city less recognized today for its cultural interest than it has been for centuries. Because it was the capital of the palatinate and as such was a great cultural center from at least the 17th century.

Library of Congress

It had been badly destroyed in the war because it was a railroad crossing and, of course, the second port in inland Europe. But it was working hard to restore itself. And it built a wonderful theater and opera house and many other cultural centers. It is only twelve kilometers from Heidelberg and of course has always been in the shadow of Heidelberg as a cultural center. I came there following Naomi Huber. And since we did not overlap I had no real knowledge of her actions in the center. So I'm afraid I surprised our people a great deal by some of my attitudes.

But I had a very successful five years there. I got to know many German people. I was as I said quite honestly though very peculiarly the only American in Mannheim by which I meant I was the only American who had regular steady contact with the Germans and to whom the Germans could come on a perfectly equal basis. Because everyone else was military. And either you had to go through channels or it was a conquering Army approach. But I was the American there from the cultural level. And I was always being appealed to or visited or questioned or inquired of all kinds of things about the United States. And that was very interesting. My staff was good and I had many activities there.

We had the lower three floors of a partially damaged hotel in a very good location in the center of Mannheim. We had a fairly large auditorium and were able to show films and could have all kinds of programs. We had an excellent music officer. And so we were able to use the programs that came down to us from the embassy. There was during those years a very large program in which young Americans had come to Europe either to further their education or to secure professional experience. That group was available. And the State Department through the embassies provided them with opportunities to speak or sing or perform in the different Amerika Hauser. This was a tremendous opportunity for them and gave us advanced quantities of excellent artists. Some of the people who are famous today had a very interesting beginning in their professional careers in the Amerika Hauser of Germany and Austria and other posts of Europe, but especially there

Library of Congress

in Germany where there were so many houses and they could go from one to the other presenting their programs.

We had a large library and we had a children's library at that time. But unfortunately we had to get rid of it when the children's program became lacking in interest at headquarters. So the books as a rule were given to the schools and were used. I personally found that the teachers were woefully lacking in English language material. And so through friends and the fact that the Army post office provided a very cheap postage cost for packages of books, I was able to secure hundreds and hundreds of copies of the National Geographic and of the Readers Digest. And those two particular magazines I arranged chronologically in groups by the month. A teacher would come in and say, could I have something in English? And I would say how many do you want? They'd say, well, I have forty in my class. I said, help yourself. Forty of that issue. And they would go out simply not believing their luck. Because they could not buy books in English English or American English, generally speaking, at that time. And the National Geographics of course were on the market at home. Because you don't want to throw them out but what do you do with them? In those days it was wonderful to be able to send them to us, and, of course, the schools appreciated them and built up their collections.

I personally spoke a good many times, usually in English but after a while in German. My fluent but ungrammatical German was improved by lessons which I got through the State Department. And in the end I was able to speak in German adequately and acceptably at any level. I also traveled around. And because I had many years in Alaska I was constantly in demand for schools and even radio educational programs to speak. And I contributed that very gladly. Even went over into France and into Italy to speak at their cultural centers.

The time came when Germany secured its state treaty, its position as an independent nation because the treaty was signed. And at that time the relationship did not change in the people. Of course, it changed officially. But because the American Houses had always

Library of Congress

been unser (our) Amerika Haus, that is our America Houses, the relationship had always been good and it remained good until the time came when Amerika Haus were let fall by the wayside. Instead they developed German American institutes. Mannheim had the honor of being the first German-American institute and as such was the pattern on which most of those were formed.

Q: Let me ask a question at this point. I gather from what you said that you felt that with the change to the German-American institutes, you lost something of the feeling of the Germans belonging to or owning that facility.

ABBEY: No. That's absolutely the reverse. We gained it because now the Germans did. They provided the income for it. Before then they had called it our Amerika Haus so it had never been a foreign thing — they felt it was theirs in that sense. But when it became German American institutes they were supporting it. And so it was very much theirs and it continued to be and is to this day. There are not as many of them as there were in the beginning. But they still exist and they still carry on a very interesting work. The one in Heidelberg has always been considered highly important because of the university there and all of the educational connections.

In the last year that I was in Germany it was decided that in phasing out we would have to let go of the German American institute, still called Amerika Haus, in Mannheim and keep the one in Heidelberg. I was transferred to Heidelberg as the director there. And for the last year I would hop back and forth between the two places because we still had an installation in Mannheim until it was phased out, and I had to supervise both of them.

Finally in 1960, in January of 1960, I was returned to the States. And there I was to have an assignment in Washington.

Comparison of Amerika Hauser and British or French Centers

Library of Congress

Q: When we were discussing things a little earlier, you made one point that I think was very significant. And that was the fact that at the Amerika Haus when the Germans came in, it was the one place in Germany which they felt they could meet with the Americans on a basis of equality. Whereas when they were on the outside they sort of felt themselves as being subjected to a secondary position and subordinate to the occupying authority. Would you care to say a few more words on that? And would you also speak to one other thing which we were talking about, and that was how did it compare regarding the French institutions of somewhat similar character and the British ones? Do you think the American ones were those in which they felt more at home? Or do you think that they felt equally at home in the French and the German?

ABBEY: I'm not in the position to discuss the French ones very much. I know they had them. I know they were very active. But it is always very difficult to achieve a personal association with a French institution or a French group. We can remain on a culturalist basis. But I don't think they ever would have called them our French houses. It would be the French house.

But the British they had always. For many years they had the British council. And that was what had most of the information center work. And the British always had a very friendly contact. There was a great deal of coming and going. To this day most cities in Germany have an English sister city and they exchange visits annually going back and forth. So there always is a very personal connection. America is much further away.

And so what I've always felt that because they called them our America Houses that they felt that they belonged there, that they had a part and that they were entitled to come there. And we always tried to make it so that they were welcome there. And then later when they had their state treaty and they had their independence and then they became German American institutes, it was even more theirs because they contributed so much to the support. I think that always the American approach has been more open, friendly — well, I'll just say more open and easier. The British reserve does not mean that they're not

Library of Congress

friendly and like that. But it's simpler and easier to walk into an America House perhaps than into a British place. I may be wrong. That is my answer. Now, your second question?

Which Parts of Amerika Hauser Programs Were Most Effective

Q: The other question I had was, if you were to think about it now and look back and evaluate your periods, both periods that you've spoken of in the Amerika Haus, what do you think was the most effective part of the program that these institutions carried out? Or do you think that they were all equally effective? I mean, was the exchange of persons more significant? Did it accomplish more? Did the book program accomplish more? Did the lectures which were given accomplish more? How would you evaluate the respective values?

ABBEY: Obviously, the exchange program would effect far fewer people directly though it would effect many and they came back and spread their information. I happened to work in the exchange in France. And I know that had a tremendous effect on any person who went to America because he was totally shattered by the spirit and came back with a completely different frame of mind which was very rapidly overcome by the absolute lack of understanding of the French and how he could behave that way. And so he would calm down and lose that feeling unless and until an American who had helped him came over. At which point all of that would go up again. And there would be nothing he could do to make some recompense for all that he had received in the U.S.A.

Now, in Germany the exchange program I observed much less directly. I did see some of it and I knew something more about the teachers and like that. But that I don't think was, to my knowledge, as an individual. Now, probably the library program reached the most. Because we had book mobiles in Germany and they reached out way out into the country. And they went back and forth and we tried to keep the widest selection possible on the shelves. And everybody borrowed books.

Library of Congress

Our work with the schools was more limited. But by reaching the teachers, as I said, by my magazine collections, by providing films for them, providing showings for them if they came in, and loaning the films, because all of the German schools had film equipment by that time. German schools are very full of equipment. And the lectures, yes, they were very important. But they would be more specific. If it was a lecture on science, you reached that group. If it was musical it covered more of a general group. It's very hard to say. I think they were cultural centers and as such they were very important in that. And insofar as they operate today they are still very important. I think that the use of the program, and by that I mean that it was a new program with a war that had never happened before And with the youth of so many of the young Americans who took part in it that that contributed to some of the abundance and the understanding. The Germans liked the young people. They liked them. They liked what they did. May I tell one story?

Q: Surely.

ABBEY: A city near Stuttgart had been badly damaged and had no concert hall. So they managed to build a concert hall. And then they collected a great deal of money and bought a very fine piano. And for the opening of that hall and the first use of that piano they asked the embassy for an outstanding pianist. The embassy sent down to them a young Negro artist. And the city, of course, in Germany the color line was simply not noticed. And so he came down. And due to some error of his arriving, anyway, he had no chance to try the piano before he went out onto the stage. And, of course, he was impeccable in tails, just perfect. Because it was for him a great opportunity. They've told him up at the embassy what the city was trying to do. And he came out and sat down at the piano. And they had not unscrewed the pedals. Well, you can imagine the horror on the part of the Germans and the position of the young American. He sat there for a minute. Then he got up and bowed very solemnly and departed from the stage. Now what's going to happen? Now what's going to happen?

Library of Congress

He returned with a screwdriver. He removed his coat, laid it over the piano stool, got down on his knees and unscrewed all of the pedals. And he got up, laid down the tool, put on his coat, bowed to them and sat down and played the concert. The city was his. I don't think anything in Germany ever effected a single group as much as that young man's acceptance and behavior that night. What else he could have done I don't know. He might have walked off and said what do I do? But he didn't. He answered it. And he certainly had a tremendous effect.

Q: He did.

ABBEY: And it was a wonderful occasion. I've always loved the story. I wish I knew who the young man was. And if he's gone on to the success he earned.

So the cultural programs of all those things, as I say, they were young Americans and they became important. They got their background. They came back. And they had good European critiques of all that. So it was very important all around. And I think the Germans appreciated.

Q: I'd like to repeat one thing. I gather from what you say that you feel that perhaps one of the greatest benefits or one of the greatest accomplishments of the Amerika Haus was the fact that the Germans could come in and speak to the Americans on an equal basis and did not feel that they were overwhelmed by an occupying authority. Am I correct in my assumption?

ABBEY: I agree with you on that. I believe that is absolutely true. I think that you couldn't help but have such a thing be important to a people who had been a master race if you wish, who had been brought up in that and then so completely done away with. To have some place where there was no differentiation, where they simply were received as themselves.

Library of Congress

Washington Assignment; American Specialists Program

Well, I went back to the States and I was assigned in Washington, D.C. to the State Department itself and in the section of American specialists. I had three most interesting years there because I was able to observe from the stateside what the embassies were requesting and how we could fill them and the persons who we would send abroad to America to represent the United States in the embassy programs. And this was true for me in all Europe. Five persons, two women and three men, and we divided the world. And we said as we sat there we felt we were like the master race when we say that.

Q: Can I ask you do: you feel that the experience you'd had, that long experience in Austria and Germany geared you particularly well to judge what kind of attractions you should send abroad and to what extent did you have a voice in selecting that type of people?

ABBEY: I think obviously that having been dealing with the receiving end for especially the five, six years in Germany (I had little to do with it in Austria). Yes, it contributed a good deal to my understanding of it. I had a good deal of choice and a good deal to do with the choice of people. Because an embassy would say we want professor of political science. Then I would have to look all over for a professor of political science, maybe one who spoke German or maybe someone who spoke French. Or they would accept a person who spoke English. They wanted this or that. And I would then try to find the person to fill their need.

On the other hand, I would get a musician we'll say. And then I would try to find different posts who would use his time or the period that he would give us. I had Russia in my bailiwick. And that presented a specific problem because Russia would or would not give visas on a purely momentary decision. I would say, would you accept this person? They'd say yes. Then I'd get them all ready and they'd say no. They didn't have to give a reason.

Library of Congress

They just said we won't give the visa. And so it was always difficult to try to pick someone who would not be controversial but who would be interesting.

Among those I sent were Irving Staw and Jimmy Ernst who is the son of Max Ernst the artist. And a chap I can't think of his name now, but he's just recently been named the equivalent to the poet laureate of the United States. He was a famous translator of French, two delightful young men. And a number of professors and others. I sent Margaret Webster who was of course a stage actress and a director. Various musicians, Michael Frager who took the Van Cliburn prize one year. Different persons like that I sent abroad on short term or long term.

The longest I ever sent abroad for was three months. And that was a gentleman named Jester Hairston who was a famous Negro choral director. And I had gotten Russia to accept him. But I could not plan for him until a year ahead. He said with his own commitments he couldn't go until next year. So he spent the year learning Russian! And I have a feeling that that's why the Russians suddenly said when he was in mid-air coming from Los Angeles they wouldn't take him. And I had to find other places. So I simply sent a message to every European post. Help! I have this man for three months. He's a choral director. What can you do? Norway took him first, Yugoslavia took him, Germany, and I did use up his time. Oh, he was bitterly disappointed that Russia wouldn't accept. They never gave a reason but I'm pretty sure it was because he learned Russian.

I want to tell you that a year or two ago he went to China and he learned Mandarin before he went, which I say for a man nearly 80 years of age is determination! But Jester Hairston is a very remarkable person. And everywhere he went he was a tremendous favorite. He went to Africa three times for the State Department. And at a party one time somebody said in my presence, "did you go to South Africa?" And he said, "no, that might be a little bit difficult." And then just like a piano keyboard, his teeth came into this gigantic smile and he said, "but if I did go they would make me an honorary white man!" And that is true which I think is the highest point of hypocrisy that I have met in a long time.

Library of Congress

So I spent the three years in sending Americans abroad and trying to match them if possible so they might go also to the Near East or to Africa, depending how it worked. It was a very interesting experience and meeting a great many interesting people and trying to find what the post wanted and trying to find persons we thought would be most interesting in the program, and advance our point of view and then asking the post if they would take them and then coordinating finally until we worked it out. Usually there would be only two or four weeks. They couldn't leave their jobs or other things. But as I said, once in a while, especially Russia, I had them for longer time. And I did get a few to Russia. I also sent Munro Leaf, the gentleman who wrote Ferdinand the Bull. He went to Russia and had a wonderful time. And as I said, Irving Stone found that all his royalties were collected. So did this man find that his were all collected there too. But as they both said you can buy only so many sable coats and cans of caviar! They could not take out the rubles.

Assignment to Paris

At the end of the 3 1/2 years I was told that I was now ready for foreign assignment again. I went in to find out what it was. And they said Paris. And I said, Paris, France? And they said, yes, Paris, France. I said, do you mean it? Well, yes. You're not going to change your mind? Well, no. But I thought if they'd ever read that I'd had Rome and Vienna and Heidelberg that they were never going to let me have Paris as well!

At any rate, I got out of town in three days. Went out to the West Coast. I said I'll go immediately if I can have two weeks to visit home. My father — I didn't know then, but it was in the last months of his life. And I'll always be glad that I took those two weeks to visit him.

And then I flew to Paris and I arrived in Paris to be met by my retiring predecessor who said I have three messages for you. Your PAO Doug Schneider says greetings and don't come to work until Monday. (It was a holiday weekend.) Two, here's your mail. And three,

Library of Congress

I have the refusal of an apartment for you. Now, everybody who went to Paris had to wait one, two, three years and never got an apartment. And here I hadn't left the airport and I have the refusal of one. I said, there's no refusal involved. Dorothy Stansbury who recently passed away, she was Dorothy Ward and she was marrying Ed Stansbury. And she would move in with him so her apartment would be free. So I went to a hotel for a couple of nights. And she said this is silly. Come and stay here and then you can just stay on when I get married. So I had a wonderful apartment on the Avenue de Suffren. As I said, if the Eiffel Tower ever fell over it would have demolished it.

I lived there for 3 1/2 years and used it for all the entertainment that I could and had many entertainments. Because in Paris I was working with the department with Ann Eckstein in the cultural part which was sending French people to America and receiving certain Americans abroad, especially the would-be teachers of French in the U.S.A. Now, they were not allowed to teach French in France. Only French-born could teach it. But they could be assistants d'anglais. And they would get the French experience and then go back. And we had 100 or more of them every year.

We had to divide them around about France. And immediately they came and we told them their assignments, 80 percent of them would just howl and cry because they weren't going to be in Paris. Well, two months later we would have a meeting and 20 percent of them were howling and crying because they got Paris and not the other places because everybody in the other places had the most marvelous experiences.

The program in Paris was largely dealing with the educational people and others, but mostly educational, whom we sent to the United States. And as I remarked, what I learned there was it's very, very difficult to break through the French, well, ego we'll say. They're egoistic. Their family, their own group. Nobody else gets into it unless somebody breaks into it. They came to America and they were simply stunned at the reception, at the openness, everything done for them. Please come to my home and like that. And they went back to France to decide, oh, we will do this too. And then all of their friends looked

Library of Congress

at them like they'd lost their buttons and they gradually froze up. However, if an American who had received them came to France, then there was not enough that they could do for them. And that I must say. Because they broke through that shell.

The years in Paris included the Kennedy assassination. And that had a most extraordinary effect on Paris. The entire people for once came out of their crust and did stop Americans on the street to commiserate. They came to the embassy in such quantities you couldn't believe it. The embassy spent days emptying the flowers to the hospitals. Because they brought the flowers until the embassy was just piled with them. The newspapers, the whole thing brought a personal reaction that was absolutely unique in anything I've ever heard of French reactions. And it was a magnificent occasion too.

De Gaulle, of course, came to the United States. But they had this requiem mass in Notre Dame on Monday which was the day I believe of the funeral here. And Mrs. De Gaulle was the hostess. And the whole of the diplomatic corps was there. And they filled right straight across the crossing of Notre Dame and all of the public came in. And the embassy people got in the main part. But of course there's five. And Anne and I got there and the French soldier usher waved us in. And we went into absolute darkness. There wasn't a soul there and we couldn't understand. They'd just opened this aisle. And so we got in the front row before the diplomatic corps. Then we heard the thousand pouring into the side aisles and naves, only breathing and movement.

And the whole service was magnificent of course. The church group came in. And then at the end of the service the Bishop of Paris led them out and he broke with all protocol. He stopped by the ambassador to speak and commiserate with him. And then the whole parade went out. So for several days there Paris was not Paris. It just was an adjunct of the sorrow in America. It was a completely unexpected and almost unknown reaction. It was very great.

Back to Washington: Foreign Nationals Orientation Program

Library of Congress

Then at the end of 3 1/2 years I returned to the United States and I had my last period of service before I had to retire. In the United States, again in the State Department, and interestingly enough the reverse of what I had done the first time. I brought in the foreign employees for background experience, for an American experience. And that was tremendously interesting because our job was not to tell the foreign employees what they should see, but to find out in advance if we could what they wanted to see and then to work out a program that included that and then such additional material as fitted either we thought their interests or perhaps let us say there was something time wise going on. And we covered the whole United States in following those needs, using Local volunteer groups.

To me it was very important that we were free to tell them, yes, you can go and look at Watts. And they didn't expect to be allowed so they could hardly believe it. Then they'd say, well, we want to go to Harlem. And we'd say, yes, you can go to Harlem. But will you go to this place also so that you get a rounded opinion? And they always looked slightly startled. But they did.

One program that we had a great deal of assistance from was fought by every person who ever came in. The National Grange cooperated with us and gave them a home experience on a farm. And every last one of them would fight like cats and dogs. No, we don't want to do that. We said, well, this one has been arranged and we can't deny the hosts and so you'll have to go. And they'd come back. Oh, it was so wonderful. I wish we'd known before. It was just the greatest thing that happened in the whole tour.

One of the things that I did and others came to it afterwards, some of my people came from so very far away that I would suggest that instead of going from Australia and back to go around the world. It wouldn't be that much more expensive. In fact, I could get around the world ticket for cheaper than would be for the round trip. And so that gave them a widening experience in seeing the rest of the world. And that was greatly valued by them. I think it was of value where they were. Because many of them had very isolated experience

Library of Congress

in their home countries. And now to get a glimpse of the whole world gave them a really wonderful opportunity.

Our groups were usually varied. We wouldn't have six from one country. We'd have ten people and they'd come from ten countries. And also that gave them a widening experience. And you would get together some people who maybe at home didn't like that country but they found they liked that person. So they would be opened.

We had one tall newspaper man—I had a newspaper group. He was Sudanese. We took them over to Maryland to Annapolis, and we were showing them around. I had a friend in Annapolis who was born abroad and was very interested in showing it. She was showing them — she said, now, this is the equivalent of the slums. Because this is the poorest section here. And we came to Colonial Avenue. And this Sudanese said, they live on Colonial Avenue? And we looked at him and said yes, of course. And then it dawned on me suddenly. I said, well, you know we are very proud of our colonial days. Of course, they were thinking colonial status. And I said wherever you go here you'll find that that's a very proud part of our background and history. Oh. He calmed down. He thought we were putting the Negroes down as colonials.

Sometimes I had the luck to go with them. I took a group up to Boston once and I went over to Annapolis. And I took three of them down to Williamsburg over the Fourth of July and it was a very interesting always to get their reactions. And in that group was a German and an Englishman and a woman from Finland. It was quite an experience.

The three years there were most worthwhile. I met many old friends from countries I had been in. And I made some friends I've seen visiting countries since then. I think it was a highly important part of the work that we were doing, because so many of our workers had never been in the United States. And it was their job to sell the United States. But it tremendously increases their value when people say, well, I was there. And also especially in those rather hectic years of hippies and Harlem and like that, to be able to

Library of Congress

tell them, yes, you can go there. But may we suggest that you go to this place too? And please be careful. We had no inadvertent difficulties I'm happy to say on those occasions. And everything, I think, went very well. And certainly they were very pleased. The posts seemed to be very well satisfied with them when they came back. I don't know just how many I brought in. But we did them usually by the quarter. So that we would have probably about forty or fifty a year. And we had some individuals of course. But mostly they came in in groups. Usually the group would be like librarian or newspaper people or cultural people so that we had the initial program in Washington to give them an opportunity to do some joint effort. I finished that up in the Spring of 1970 and turned that job over to Jeff Biggs. And then I retired. And I am happy to say that I had a marvelous career from my point of view.

Q: Just one final question. When you had these people coming from abroad who asked to be sent to Watts or to Harlem or to similar places, were they primarily from black countries? Or did you get this same kind of a question from doubting Europeans and other parts of the world?

ABBEY: Oh, absolutely. There was no racial point to it at all. It was the world interest. I don't offhand remember even if the blacks wanted to go to those places. I imagine some of them would. But I was so rarely conscious you might say of a color line there that I can't answer you. But I do know that it was a general world feeling.

And we tried to give them what they asked for and not push down their throat what we wanted. Because what we wanted was the reaction from them. And if that's what they felt they needed most we wanted them to have it. And then if we felt the program was lacking in variety we would suggest or we would send them that way and they would spend two days here. And we tried to give them as much of a variety of the United States as possible.

And you will appreciate, some of them went up to Seattle. They were going to go down to San Francisco, Los Angeles. I would put them on not the plane that leaped from Seattle to

Library of Congress

Los Angeles but on something that stopped saw the country. If you're up there at 30,000 feet what do you — well, maybe it was 20,000 feet then. But you don't see much. But by coming up and down that way they saw the mountains. They saw the country much more and they enjoyed it. And they always appreciated that they had a chance to look at it. And we had wonderful cooperation from the cities; the volunteer organizations there. We would phone and they came through with bells on. Everybody came back. Oh, they'd been so happy.

Q: Well, Denise this has been a very interesting interview and I thank you very much.

ABBEY: May I make one addition? I'd like to tell you about Colonel Henderson because I think I'm one of the few people who knows him. I did speak about in the very first days when I was working in Washington, D.C. we had an occasion where a Colonel Henderson — I'll take a correction on that but that's my remembrance of his name — came in and spoke to us on the foundation of the Information Program of the United States. And that was that he was on the staff of General Eisenhower at the point when they planned the invasion of Africa. And they had, of course, for a long time been sending messages across the line, firing mobile shells that exploded with pamphlets, all the things like that.

But somebody realized that the first ground that we liberated would have another group of people who were no longer being aimed at and who wouldn't get that material but who needed it just as badly or even more because they were now on our side of the fence. And so General Eisenhower turned to this colonel and said, fix it up. And so he had three days to get what material he could think of. And he got together magazines, books, pictures, anything he could get. And when they landed as soon as they were in Casa Blanca, they took a store with lots of windows. They didn't have much material. So they plastered it with pictures. And then they had English titles because the pictures came that way. But they got the titles translated into French and Arabic and plastered it up there, too, that guaranteed that there were always hundreds of people standing there getting their first unadulterated news in years. And that was the beginning, the very beginning. Because

Library of Congress

wherever they went forward they would take another shop or store. They called it a prop, a propaganda shop. And put the materials there, first on the windows. And then as they got newspapers or as they got books or magazines, put them in so that the people would have a chance to get at it. And that was the birth of the information program as a program for the people who were liberated rather than information across the lines.

And when a couple of years later they were planning to go into France from the south, the southern invasion, I worked briefly in John Albert's office where he was stockpiling for that invasion. Then we had everything, books, magazines, everything you could think of, to be brought in immediately to set up the prop shops at that time. But that was a most interesting lecture that he gave. And everybody who was in OWI at the moment came in for it. I don't know if there's any other record of it though I'm sure it could be chased down through the notes of the landing in Casa Blanca.

Q: And is he the same Henderson with whom you later worked?

ABBEY: No, I worked with Anderson.

Q: Oh, Anderson. I see.

ABBEY: Walter Anderson.

Q: Yes. Well, once again, thank you very much Denise for this interview. It's vastly interesting. And when we get it transcribed we will send it to you for editing so that if you want to make any changes or fill in the spelling of some of the names that undoubtedly will be difficult for the transcribers to accomplish, you can then complete it and send it back and we'll make a finished copy.

ABBEY: All right. Thank you very much. I'll do my best for you. I have enjoyed it thoroughly. And I hope that I've given you some material that will be verifiable or cross reference or maybe even be unique.

Library of Congress

Q: *You certainly have. I'm sure of that.*

End of interview